

Again, if no classes can be followed for want of time or opportunity, a Reading Circle is a possibility in the most quiet places.

The National Home Reading Union is arranged to suit the wants of every class of reader. A small number of members is required to form a Circle, but individual membership is also possible; a magazine is issued monthly, containing helpful notes on many of the books suggested for reading; a list of books to be read in the various courses is published at the beginning of every session, and from this the "Circle" can make selections. There is a Botany Club also, notes of which come out in the magazine. Miss Mondy, the secretary, Surrey House, Victoria Embankment, London, W.C., is most kind in helping with the formation of new circles.

In the January, 1899, issue of our Magazine there appeared a short account of the summer holiday spent under the auspices of the National Home Reading Union. These annual meetings, and those of the University Extension, which are held in the summer holidays alternately at Oxford and Cambridge, ought to appeal to all teachers. It would be most delightful if a number of students could arrange to attend these courses together. Expenses can be considerably reduced when several combine, as a reduction is then made on the tickets.

Many complaints are made by isolated members of our Association about the want of unity amongst us, and there is much reason in these complaints. The carrying out of some such suggestions as are made in this paper would not only prove helpful to teachers who have their work at heart, but would also afford that very bond of union which many of us so earnestly desire.

E. M. F.

THE COMING CENTURY.

CHARACTERS.

| | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| OLD CENTURY. | SPECIMEN CHILD. |
| NEW CENTURY. | FRENCH MAN. |
| SPECIMEN MAN. | FRENCH LADY. |
| SPECIMEN LADY. | |

SCENE I.

A Cave in Cloudland. The Old Century discovered warming her hands over the fire and looking anxiously at the clock.
(Time : Dec. 31st, 11-30 p.m.)

SOLO Air, "When I was Young."

Here by my old hearth-stone
I, sad and all alone,
Sit while the hours move on
In merry throng.
I, too, have had my day;
Work, trial, fun, and play —
All things were good, they say,
When I was young.

Then I did wake to hear,
Under my window near,
The Mail horn sounding clear
Or watchman's tongue.
Now all these have passed by,
List to the engine's cry —
Noise enough to make me fly
If I were young !

Nay, nay, let no regret
Make these dull eyelids wet,
Nor alway memory set
Grief in her song.
The coming times shall bring
Every good and useful thing
Promised vaguely in the Spring
When I was young !

(*Rises.*) Well, well, I wish that young woman would come quickly. There's such a lot of business to be gone through, and my poor old head gets so muddled.

N. C. (*bouncing in*). Good morrow, good mother; good mother, good morrow!

O. C. (*stiffly*). When I was young, my dear, *we* said to our elders: "Good day, ma'am, I hope I find you in good health."

N. C. My dear lady, we have got just half-an-hour to do our business in—there really is *not* time for you to tell stories of your youth!

O. C. (*getting up, fumbling about*). Very well, Miss—and may you never be flustered out of your wits by the amount you have to do. (*At last finds and unrolls map of the world.*)

N. C. Why, what is the matter with that thing? It looks as if it had scarlet fever!

O. C. British possessions, my dear.

N. C. Oh, I like the colour so much I think I'll paint the whole map with it!

O. C. (*drily*). They've tried pretty hard in my time, but you'll find it difficult!

N. C. Well, let us get on to the next thing.

O. C. (*showing weather chart*). Now, in this department, whatever you do is *always* wrong—people in the world do grumble so!

N. C. Well, I'll give 'em taps laid on—hot and cold!—and they can please themselves.

O. C. (*laying a warning finger on her arm*). Now, my dear, whatever you do *don't* spoil them. I've given them trains and trams, steam and electric, and ironclads, and maxims, and penny poets, and gas stoves, and "put a penny in the slot," and policemen, and penny postage stamps, and a *Daily Mail*, and telegrams, and telephones, and all the other "phones" that ever were, and bikes and motor-cars, and all the comforts of home! Yet if they want to call anything particularly bad they say its *fin de siècle*, and abuse a poor old woman who gave them good ideas, and left them to work them out for themselves! (*Sobs.*)

N. C. Well, you've told me what you've done, but you have not told me what I am to do.

O. C. My dear, the clock is going to strike! You will just have to manage as well as you can, for it's time I had a rest. I began life (*the clock begins to strike and O. C. gets sleepier and sleepier*) in far—worse—times—they—were—fighting.

N. C. (*throwing herself on her knees beside O. C.*). Oh, don't chatter, say something practical at once!

O. C. Manners—my—dear—make—man (*clock begins striking, and O. C. goes sound asleep*).

N. C. Well, that is a blessing! Now I can go my own way without any bother! Let's look at the map. What is the good of having railways if there is no "through communication"? Oh, they must hurry up and finish all these, and then I can start my balloon steerage cars. Well, I suppose its time I started down to the world and woke the good folk up a bit. Oh, there are good times coming! I do mean to astonish the natives! The Twentieth Century is going to beat the record every way!

SCENE II.

Father Time's Office. N. C. alone, consulting the hour glass.

N. C. Three seconds late already! How these real people do waste time! (*Enter S. M.*) Ah, here's the man at last!

S. M. Mornin'. Wired: say 12-5.

N. C. Well, at least you've begun the right way, not wasting words, though you have lost three seconds. Now listen to me. You are a man of business—

S. M. (*producing note book*). Any orders?

N. C. (*sharply*). Oh, yes, I've plenty of orders to give you, but I don't give money, only "change" (*pointing to map*). You must alter all this—run a railway right through from the Cape to Cairo, on underhand lines with overhead balloon cars—its all so much in the air, you know! Start a landed company to buy up all the castles in Spain. Invent a telegraph receiver to fit on the human ear. There's plenty more, but that will do to begin with.

S. M. Rather a bore.

N. C. A Boer (bore)! Oh, you mus'nt mention them, its so disloyal! We are not going to have any in the Twentieth Century!

S. M. A'right—so long! (*Exit.*)

N. C. Now then for the woman, unpunctual, as usual. (*Enter S. L.*) Good day, Madame.

S. L. (*gushing, shaking hands affectedly*). How do you do; so pleased to meet you at last; now *don't* run away too soon, I like people to keep young!

N. C. I want to consult you on important business.

S. L. So kind of you. I just *love* to be useful!

N. C. I want you to be ornamental, too.

S. L. With *pleasure*. Will it need a bazaar?

N. C. No, my dear lady! You see my poor old friend, the Nineteenth Century, before she died was so upset by the things her sisters would say of her that I thought we might make the fashions useful and stop it all!

S. L. The fashions? Oh, charmed, I'm sure—but how?

N. C. Well, I want you all to wear "armoured trains" to prevent "back-biting," and go back to those nice old-fashioned coal-scuttle bonnets; then you can heap coals of fire on your enemies' heads!

S. L. Oh, yes! That will be perfect! I do so like *making it hot* for people.

N. C. Yes, I know you are very warm-hearted!

S. L. But do you think it will be becoming?

N. C. Oh, yes. *All* coming fashions are becoming!

S. L. Then I'll have one made at once.

N. C. Do—there is nothing like striking while the iron is hot; it helps to rivet the plates!

S. L. Good afternoon. So pleased to have met you. (*Exit.*)

N. C. Now then, for the child. (*Enter child.*) Come along, my little dear.

Child. I'se shy.

N. C. Oh, I am not going to have that (*snaps her fingers violently in child's face, and gobbles like a turkey; child looks up, starts violently, and begins to howl*). Now, listen to me—you've got to be a wonder! Tie this book on your wrist,

read a bit every now and then, and you'll soon know it by heart.

Ch. Oo's a nassy horrid sing.

N. C. Its everybody's guide to everything. Now, remember, you've got to know better than anybody else.

Ch. Yes, but p'ease I wants to go home (*howls*).

N. C. Oh dear, oh dear, however do their mothers manage them! Now, remember, you are not only to be sure, you are to be cock-sure, my chick! Somebody must be right, so why should'nt *you* be?

Ch. Mummie is *always* wite!

N. C. Oh, you are old-fashioned; worse than the Nineteenth Century!

Ch. Oo's vussy wude.

N. C. Well, *she* said "manners maketh man." So put on enough "manner" (*struts*) and you'll soon be a man!

Ch. I don't lub oo.

N. C. There, now! (*putting book and spectacles on to child*). Run away and set everybody right (*child flies*). That was the worst of all. I wonder how they will like my infant prodigy down below. Now I must go and make a little time out of half of nothing—ah, me!

SCENE III.

The Paris Exhibition. Enter Specimen Man, Specimen Lady, Specimen Child, and French Man and Lady. Both ladies wear armoured trains (i.e., sheets of silver paper) and coal-scuttle bonnets; both couples walk round, looking at the stalls and each other.

S. L. (*with withering scorn*). Look at that wretch! She has got a train like mine! Copy-cat!

F. L. Vat do you say? We begin all de fashions.

S. L. (*very stiffly*). I beg your pardon, *would* you mind telling me the name of your dressmaker?

F. L. *Marchande de Toilette*.

S. L. Marchand! He may try to steal our Fashoda, but he shan't steal my fashions! (*Both turn their backs; there is a collision between their trains.*)

S. M. Help! Murder! Fire! There has been a collision!

F. M. Oh, you John Bulldawg, le me fight you! (*They fight while ladies repair their trains.*)

Ch. (*suddenly*). Oh, Mummie, there is such an uncomfy little voice tickling my ear.

S. M. Hi, stop, its a telegram for me. Where is my receiver? (*Fumbles.*)

Ch. Its coming out! "War declared between England and France. Come home."—English Government.

S. M. and F. M. (*retreating to opposite sides of stage while ladies fight with their fans, in dancing steps right centre*). How? What? When? Why?

F. M. Dat is because your Cape to Cairo railway have run over de big toe of our dear young friend the Khedive.

S. M. Its because you are always poaching on other people's preserves.

Ch. 'Tisn't. I know better. Its because they all want to play soldiers.

N. C. (*rushing in and parting the ladies*). My dear children! Whatever is the matter? Fighting!

All. Its because—he—she—it—they say—I tell you. (*They all crowd round her, speaking at once.*)

N. C. Hush! I shall ask the child. What is it?

Ch. They will go on so fast I don't know what its all about!

N. C. Ah! That's it! You are all going on too fast! I did not mean you to begin all these things at once. There is a hundred years before you. Take things gently. Its slow and sure wins the race.

S. L. (*wringing her hands*). But we shall all be killed if we stay here. Remember the war.

N. C. Oh, I've arranged all that. Its all to be done in the newspapers; in fact it is all over—except the shouting!

Ch. What shall we play at now? I'm tired of this quarrelling.

N. C. Oh, we'll sit down and have a nice long talk about nothing. That is a "Peace Conference," you know.

S. M. I propose we stand up and sing it. It is more cheerful.

All. Agreed. Charming. All right. *Tant mieux*, etc.

(*Specimen Man gives his arm to French Lady and French Man to Specimen Lady; go to right and left of New Century and Child.*)

Air, "Rule Britannia."

When I stepped forth at Heaven's command,
(she) Arose and worked with might and main,
We held a charter, a charter for our land;
We always made our meaning plain.

Chorus.—Worlds of wonders, great marvels in all climes,
Oh, there never, never, never were such times.

All nations shall be blest as we,
All tyrants in their turn shall fall.
And each shall flourish, shall flourish great and free,
For she'll take care to right them all.
(I'll)

Chorus.—Worlds of wonders, great marvels in all climes,
Oh, there never, never, never were such times.

(*Dance and exit.*)

R. A. P.